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## **Religious Voters and the Religious-Secular Cleavage Since 1990**

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### **Key Words**

party systems; religion; elections; voting behaviour; social cleavages

### **Abstract**

Most studies of electoral behaviour in New Zealand do not pay much attention to the religious-secular cleavage. While a few studies noted a religious-secular cleavage prior to the adoption of proportional representation, most have assumed that such a divide since 1996 has been confined to the margins of electoral politics, with religious voters supporting smaller third parties over National. This article re-evaluates this conclusion using data from the New Zealand Election Study since 1990. The analyses show that, rather than supporting small third parties more clearly representing issues of concern to them, religious voters have voted largely for National in most elections as part of a religious-secular cleavage between National and Labour. Fluctuation in support for National among religious voters is tied to National's electoral fortunes: religious voters have been more likely to support National when the party has been likely to form the next government, but more likely to cast votes for third parties when National's prospects have been poor.

As identified by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) in their magisterial study of party system development, one major social cleavage that divides the electorates of several countries is the cleavage between religious and secular. Although other cleavages have declined in significance over the last several decades since the publication of their seminal study (Franklin, Mackie, and Valen 1992), the divide between religious and secular remains significant in many countries despite considerable secularisation (Elff 2007; Minkenberg 2010). Though rarely emphasised relative to the impact of other social cleavages, some previous research from prior to the adoption of mixed-member proportional representation (MMP) found evidence of a religious-secular cleavage in New Zealand between the more religiously inclined National Party and the more secular Labour Party (Levine and Robinson 1976; Bean 1988, 1992; Minkenberg 2010).

Since the adoption of MMP, however, the consensus view is that religious differences are largely irrelevant for electoral politics, affecting only support for third parties on the margins of New Zealand politics (Boston 1994, 74; Barker and McLeay 2000, 145-147). Because third parties explicitly representing the social conservatism of religious voters compete with National for religious voters' support (while religious-secular issues have not been the primary foci of the two largest parties), and because MMP provides more incentives for religious voters to support third parties than was the case under first-past-the-post, religious voters may have shifted their support to third parties representing socially conservative issues explicitly. As a result, the religious-secular cleavage between National and Labour in elections seen in earlier elections is argued to have disappeared in elections held under MMP.

In contrast to previous research, I argue that the religious-secular cleavage remains an independent cleavage in New Zealand electoral politics that divides National and Labour voters. Moreover, I argue that this is due to the fact that the bulk of religious voters' support

in most elections has gone to National. While many religious voters tried supporting socially conservative third parties immediately after MMP was adopted, they reverted to supporting National because these third parties failed to deliver many seats and offered even less influence over policy than is offered when supporting National. This reversion back to National has occurred because National remains the most likely right-of-centre party to form a government (more so today than between 1993 and 2002).

In the next section, I review the existing evidence—both the literature suggesting a religious-secular cleavage exists and the literature suggesting it does not—in greater detail. Following that, I conduct two sets of analyses. The first examines the impact of religious-secular differences on voting behaviour between National and Labour in recent elections; the second examines the degree to which religious voters’ support has gone to National (as it did in the past) relative to third-party alternatives. A final section concludes with a discussion regarding the need to revisit the importance of the religious-secular cleavage in New Zealand politics.

## **Theoretical Background**

When discussing the social bases of electoral politics in New Zealand, previous research identifies several relevant social cleavages.<sup>i</sup> The most obvious are class issues, which have constituted the main division between Labour and National since the 1930s (Alford 1963; Robinson 1967; Bean 1988). A second is an ethnic cleavage whereby Māori and Pacific Islander voters overwhelmingly support Labour whilst National draw largely from voters of European descent (Aimer and Vowles 2004; Iusitini and Crothers 2013). In addition to these cleavages, other research finds evidence of an urban-rural cleavage (Honey and Barnett 1990), a gender gap (Coffé 2013), and differences in voting behaviour among religious denominations.<sup>ii</sup>

One cleavage that has received relatively little attention is the religious-secular

cleavage.<sup>iii</sup> Those few studies examining this religious-secular cleavage find that religious voters favour National—due to the social conservatism of religious voters relative to secular voters<sup>iv</sup>—whilst secular voters prefer Labour (Levine and Robinson 1976, 317-319; Bean 1988; Minkenberg 2010). Though these findings have received only scant attention, in part due to the greater strength of other cleavage-based explanations, these previous studies suggest that a religious-secular cleavage in voting behaviour was present throughout much of the twentieth century.

However, the fact that most studies examining the religious-secular cleavage are confined to the period prior to the adoption of MMP leaves open the question whether a religious-secular cleavage persists into the present day. Since the adoption of MMP, most studies examining New Zealand party politics have either declared religious issues to be of minor consequence for electoral politics (at least for party choice between National and Labour) (Vowles 1998a, 66-67; Barker and McLeay 2000, 145-147) or ignored religious-secular issues altogether (Boston 1994, 74; Fairburn and Haslett 2005, 530). Further evidence that the religious-secular cleavage has been marginalised is the fact that the main parties say very little about issues dealing with religious-secular themes: one is hard-pressed, for instance, to find issues pertaining in a meaningful way to religion in the major parties' recent manifestos.

The reason many believe the religious-secular cleavage, to the extent that it divided National and Labour voters in the past, has disappeared is because MMP provides incentives for the two largest parties not to represent religious/secular issues. Because National and Labour are rooted primarily in class and ethnic cleavages, these parties have an incentive to avoid issues of morality, which may divide the parties internally and in turn distract from the parties' primary agendas—as has been the case with parties in other Westminster systems (Smith and Tatalovich 2003). Moreover, because MMP produces seat shares that are more

proportional to parties' vote shares, third parties representing specific issues that the two largest parties do not fully address are more likely to attract enough support to win representation than they would under the first-past-the-post system. Given this, one might expect that any religious-secular cleavage observed between National and Labour prior to the adoption of MMP would have evaporated, as these two parties concentrate on issues related to their ethnic and class-based differences and leave religious-secular issues to be represented by third parties. The early success of the Christian Coalition shortly after the adoption of MMP suggests as much. As a result, previous research argues that a religious-secular cleavage—if such a divide exists—remains confined to the fringes of politics, failing to impact support for the two main parties.

Despite these arguments, there are reasons to believe that a religious-secular cleavage persists. Were the base of religious voters to decline in size, this would suggest that the impact of religious voters on support for National has declined, as variation in the impact of social cleavages on party support depends in part on the size of groups (Lachat 2007; Best 2011). While there certainly has been considerable secularisation of society over the past several decades (Hoverd 2008; Vaccarino, Kavan, and Gendall 2011), religion has not gone away and there is still a fairly steady base of religious voters. Among those who remain religiously committed, issues of traditional morality may still matter at the ballot box. If anything, the fact that societal development and the secularisation of society lead to more socially conservative religious voters suggests religious voters today will be even more likely to support right-leaning parties than in the past (Gaskins, Golder, and Siegel 2013).

The persistence of religious voters as a small, but non-trivial constituency can be seen in Figure 1, which displays the proportion of voters in each election attending religious services at least once per month between 1990 and 2014 using data from the New Zealand Election Studies. Figure 1 shows that the proportion of voters attending religious services at

least once a month in 2014 was roughly similar to that proportion observed in 1990: despite societal secularisation, roughly 20 percent of the voting population remains religiously observant. Thus, the pool of religious voters who could potentially support National remains nearly as deep as was the case in elections prior to the adoption of MMP. As a result, if the religious-secular cleavage has disappeared, this was not due to a lack of religious voters.

On a more fundamental level, one would expect the religious-secular cleavage to persist because issues of concern to religious voters continue to divide society in New Zealand, and thus should continue to play at least some independent role in electoral politics. While they rarely feature prominently in political campaigns, important social issues like abortion, same-sex civil unions/marriage, LGBTQ rights, divorce, prostitution, and euthanasia (to name a few) have emerged as major political issues since the adoption of MMP (“Prostitution decriminalised.” 2003; “MPs vote 65-55.” 2004; Ahdar 2006; Rishworth 2007; Findlay 2011). As was the case prior to the adoption of MMP, these issues have been decided as free votes (Lindsey 2010). Though many National Members of Parliament (MPs) supported the socially conservative positions on votes deciding these issues, National’s caucus has become more socially liberal in recent years, as exemplified by the bill legalising same-sex marriage on which National MPs split almost evenly between supporters and opponents. The lack of clear party positions in favour of the socially conservative values held by many religious voters created an opening for several third parties taking much more socially conservative stances to represent these issues in the hopes that they might be rewarded by voters, who are more likely to support them under MMP than was the case prior to 1996. Thus, while the continued presence of political issues of concern to socially conservative religious voters provides evidence that a religious-secular cleavage persists, the presence of third parties explicitly representing socially conservative positions suggests that many religious voters may have shifted their support to these parties.

While a religious-secular cleavage could support the development of third parties under MMP that are focused primarily on representing issues of concern to socially conservative religious voters, there is reason to believe that many religious voters will continue to concentrate their support primarily on National as long as National's chances of forming the government are strong. Despite the use of MMP and the availability of socially conservative third parties, electoral politics in New Zealand remain strongly rooted in the two-party dualism of the pre-1996 party system. While a handful of religiously-oriented parties capable of representing religious issues have emerged since the adoption of MMP, none have been particularly successful or have survived over several elections.

The lack of long-term viability for these socially conservative parties is predicted by previous research suggesting that religious groups constituting less than a majority will seek to preserve resources and enhance their political power by working with large parties that have the best chance of implementing policy instead of third parties catering to particular groups of religious voters.<sup>v</sup> Because religious voters constitute a small share of the electorate, third parties appealing exclusively to socially conservative religious voters have virtually no chance of attracting enough votes to put such parties in contention to form the government. Given the effects of other social cleavages like class, ethnicity, and urban-rural residence noted above that likely undermine the cohesiveness of religious voters as a voting bloc, the exclusive appeals of these socially conservative parties even make it difficult for such parties to win enough votes to cross the five percent threshold to win parliamentary representation. Without representation, these parties cannot deliver on the policies their supporters demand.

With these limitations in mind, and because National remain the only right-of-centre party that could plausibly form a government, many socially conservative religious voters may have come to view that they are better served by supporting National and pressuring their MPs to support their issue concerns than they are when supporting socially conservative



third parties. While these religious voters might not have perceived a benefit to supporting National when the party had no chance of forming the government—as was the case in the 1990s and early 2000s—they may be more likely to vote for National now that the party stands a good chance of leading the government and given that the socially conservative third parties they have supported in the past have failed to elect many seats. By supporting National over third-party alternatives, socially conservative religious voters can put pressure on National MPs to represent their positions on votes dealing with issues of morality. Even if this tactic is not always successful (e.g. marriage rights were extended to same-sex couples under a National government), socially conservative religious voters are at least able to lobby a larger number of potentially sympathetic MPs when they support National; such lobbying was not possible when they supported third parties without parliamentary representation.<sup>vi</sup>

We can see some evidence in favour of this argument when looking at the history of socially conservative third parties under MMP. Immediately after MMP was introduced (and when the impact of one's voting behaviour were hard to gauge due to National's weak position in the polls - Vowles 1998a, 72, 1998b, 34-35), many religious voters followed the cues of those like Graeme Lee, who left National because he and they thought the party was insufficiently conservative, and supported the Christian Coalition. Although the Christian Coalition failed to breach the five percent threshold in 1996 and the coalition split back into separate parties, these religious voters faced few incentives to switch their support back to National in 1999 as National's declining support decreased its chances of forming a government. Because National fared even worse in 2002 than it did in 1999, religious voters supporting the successor to Lee's Christian Democrats followed the cues of Future New Zealand party members when they merged with United to form United First New Zealand. While United Future won nearly seven percent of the vote and eight MPs in 2002, internal party squabbles would drive many religious voters away from the party, resulting in the

downward trend in United Future's support that has been evident since 2005. Although the Conservative Party—formed by many of the Future New Zealand members who quit United Future—continues to contest elections, the Conservatives have also failed to attract sufficient support to cross the five percent threshold. Thus, socially conservative parties have proved to be weak contenders under MMP.

After several socially conservative parties failed to attract many votes and/or exert much political influence, many religious voters may have come to perceive that their votes would be more effective if they voted National. These religious voters may have been tempted to support National as the party's prospects of forming the government started to improve in 2005, a process that was likely accelerated in elections since 2008 when National went on to form three governments. While National's positions are less clearly conservative than the third parties mentioned above, supporting National at least allows these religious voters the chance to lobby MPs they had a part in electing to represent their values on votes in Parliament deciding issues of morality.

In sum, there is reason to believe that the religious-secular cleavage seen in elections prior to the adoption of MMP (Levine and Robinson 1976; Bean 1988, 317-319, 1992; Minkenberg 2010) has persisted in recent elections. Despite the use of MMP and the presence of parties adopting socially conservative positions, socially conservative religious voters have incentives to support National over socially conservative third parties—particularly when National is in contention to form the government. The remainder of this article examines whether the evidence bears out these claims.

## **Research Design**

To determine whether a religious-secular cleavage between National and Labour exists in the contemporary party system—and if so, how durable this cleavage is—I examine data from the New Zealand Election Surveys (NZES) between 1990 and 2014. These dates

cover the entire period under MMP. This allows me to examine voting behaviour before and after the adoption of MMP in order to determine whether the incentives for greater party system fragmentation under MMP have resulted in a weakening of any religious-secular cleavage, or whether a religious-secular cleavage between National and Labour remains salient *despite* MMP.

The analysis proceeds in two steps. First, I examine voting behaviour using a dependent variable that is coded one for National and zero for Labour. Because the discussion above suggests religious-secular differences divide voters primarily along National-Labour lines, I initially focus primarily on voting for these two parties. These analyses use binary logistic regression to estimate National/Labour support. To determine whether the religious-secular manifests itself primarily as a divide between National and Labour or whether most religious voters have shifted their support to more socially conservative third parties, the second step in the analysis examines the degree to which religious voters support National relative to other alternatives. This second analysis includes all parties in each survey supported by more than 30 respondents to ensure sufficient numbers of observations for multinomial logistic regression models to converge with reliable estimates. With the exceptions of 1990 and 1993 (in which voters cast only one ballot), I examine voting behaviour on the party ballot because this ballot more clearly represents respondents' sincere party preferences under MMP rules (as opposed to the electorate vote, which may be conditioned by tactical voting concerns). As a result of examining the party ballot, the chances of finding evidence of a religious-secular cleavage between National and Labour are reduced due to the greater incentives for socially conservative religious voters to support third parties on the party ballot.<sup>vii</sup>

To measure religious-secular differences, I divide respondents according to respondents' frequency of attendance at religious services—which is one of the standard

measures used in previous research (Elff 2007; Minkenberg 2010). I code respondents attending religious services once a month or more as one and those attending less frequently as zero.<sup>viii</sup> I use this coding scheme rather than the entire range of the scale due to differences in measurement between the 1990 and 1993 NZES and subsequent NZES surveys: whereas the 1990 and 1993 NZES uses five categories (once a week, two-three times per month, several times per year, less than several times per year, and never), subsequent NZES waves included a sixth category for those attending once per month.<sup>ix</sup> That being said, using the full range of the scale produces results that are substantively equivalent to those presented here.

In order to reduce the possibility that any relationship between attendance and vote choice is due to the impact of other social group-based effects that overlap with religious-secular differences, I include several variables to control for the major alternative hypotheses. In addition to religious service attendance, I include a dummy variable ('Traditional') measuring voters belonging to religious denominations that have traditionally supported National (Anglicans, Presbyterians, Catholics, and Methodists) (See, e.g., Vowles 1998a, 66-67). Because the effect of attendance may be redundant among voters belonging to these religious groups (i.e. religious voters belonging to each of the four denominations was already likely to vote for National irrespective of their religious commitment), I include a variable measuring the interaction between this variable and attendance. To rule out the possibility that what appears to be a religious-secular cleavage may turn out to be spurious once accounting for the differences between voters belonging to ethnic minority groups and voters of European descent, I include a dummy variable in which voters of European descent are coded zero, and respondents of all other ethnicities are coded one.

To rule out the impact of the class cleavage/socioeconomic differences, which are generally believed to be the most important social group forces structuring political choices in New Zealand, I include dummy variables measuring households with union members and

respondents holding university degrees, as well as a variable measuring household income. In 1990, the income variable ranges from zero to six (low to high income); in 1993 and 1996, this variable ranges from zero to eight; and from 1999 to 2011, this variable ranges from zero to seven. Due to the high numbers of non-responses, I use mean substitution for missing values. Additionally, I include dummy variables for respondents residing in rural areas (to control for the urban-rural divide), a dummy variable for female respondents to control for a possible gender gap, and respondents' ages at the time of election. In order to facilitate comparisons between the effect of attendance and the effects of each other variable, I standardise income and age by subtracting the mean from each variable and dividing each by twice the standard deviation; previous research shows this allows for comparisons between scale and dummy variables (Gelman 2008).

### **The Religious-Secular Cleavage Between National and Labour**

Parameter estimates from each regression model estimating the impact of attendance on National/Labour voting behaviour appear in Table 1. Prior to the adoption of MMP, high frequency of attendance was associated with a higher likelihood of voting for National, as indicated by the statistically significant coefficients for the variables measuring frequent attendance. Following the adoption of MMP, the estimated effect of frequent attendance is reduced and becomes statistically insignificant between 1996 and 2002. This effect becomes statistically significant again in 2005 and remains so through 2014. Thus, the results show that there has been a religious-secular cleavage evident in most elections despite the adoption of MMP.

The results show that the differences between religious and secular voters in most instances remain significant after controlling for alternative explanations. Those belonging to the four denominations that have traditionally supported National are significantly more likely to vote for National (while the effect of attendance among these voters is tempered by

their denominational background, as implied by the negative coefficient for the interaction). The results also suggest that voters of non-European descent are significantly less likely to vote National than voters of European descent. Although the coefficients for the attendance variable suggest the effects of the religious-secular cleavage in most elections are not as strong as the effects of other variables like income or union membership, the results suggest the impact of attendance is also independent of the effects of the other major cleavages.

To visualise the impact of the religious-secular cleavage on voting behaviour, Figure 2 presents the predicted probabilities of voting for National among frequently and infrequently-attending voters. I generate these probabilities assuming voters do not belong to one of the religious denominations that traditionally have supported National (in order to focus on the effect of attendance as distinct from this denominational effect of religion) and holding all other variables to their median values. With the exception of elections between 1996 and 2002, Figure 2 shows that the majority of frequently-attending voters (after controlling for the other variables in the model) voted for National over Labour. In the last several elections, the probabilities of frequently-attending voters supporting National over Labour are even greater than those observed in the two elections held prior to the adoption of MMP. While the probabilities of infrequently-attending voters supporting National also increase substantially over the last several elections,<sup>x</sup> the fact remains that religious voters—or at least those of European descent—continue to concentrate their support on National rather than Labour. Moreover, while the predicted probabilities of voting for National among frequently-attending voters are not significantly different from infrequently-attending voters between 1996 and 2002, these probabilities are significantly different from one another between 2005 and 2014.

Taken together, these conclusions suggest that the adoption of MMP has not eliminated the religious-secular cleavage between National and Labour. While the cleavage

disappeared between 1996 and 2002, the majority of religious voters of European descent have supported National over Labour in recent elections much as they did prior to the adoption of MMP. What remains to be seen is whether this small base of religious voters continues to concentrate its support on National to the same degree as prior to the adoption of MMP or whether the religious-secular cleavage has been transformed under MMP, with most religious voters transferring their support to socially conservative third parties instead of supporting National.

### **Religious Voters and Support for Third-Party Alternatives**

To evaluate whether the religious-secular cleavage remains concentrated primarily on National and Labour or whether religious voters have switched to third parties more explicitly representing issues of concern to socially conservative religious voters, I re-estimated each model in Table 1 by replacing the binary vote choice measure with a categorical measure including all parties in each election whose support could reliably be estimated using multinomial logistic regression. For ease of interpretation, I omit parameter estimates and instead present the predicted probabilities of voting for each party among voters frequently attending religious services (holding all other variables at their median values) in Table 2. To help the reader evaluate the argument that the degree to which religious voters support National over third-party alternatives depends in part on National's chances of forming a government, I present National's vote share in each election at the top of Table 2. While National's vote share is a problematic *ex ante* measure, it is a good proxy for the likelihood that National will form the government: because pre-election polls have predicted National's final vote shares quite well (See, e.g., Levine and Roberts 1991, 1994; DigiPoll 2014),<sup>xi</sup> National's vote shares reflect the fact that voters could anticipate whether National was a viable contender for government and adjust their behaviour accordingly.

The predicted probabilities in Table 2—generated by holding other variables at their

medians—show a sharp disparity in the predicted probabilities of voting National during the period following the adoption of MMP. On the one hand, religious voters in the three most recent elections—when limiting the definition of ‘religious voters’ to those of European descent—tend to support National over third-party alternatives. In these elections, support among voters frequently attending religious services is as high as the levels of support observed in 1990 prior to the adoption of MMP and significantly greater than the predicted probabilities of voting for Labour.

While at least a plurality of religious voters of European descent between 2005 and 2014 support National over third-party alternatives to the same degree as 1990, National does not attract the plurality of these voters’ support between 1996 and 2002.<sup>xii</sup> In these three elections, support for National among religious voters of European descent is lower than the support observed among Labour. Although many religious voters in these three elections side with Labour, these religious voters also desert National for third parties more explicitly representing issues of concern to socially conservative religious voters. This includes the Christian Coalition in 1996 (where the predicted probability of support among voters frequently attending religious services is 52 percent), Christian Heritage (with a predicted probability of 19 percent), and United Future (where the predicted probability is 43 percent). Even though National receives a plurality of the support of religious voters of European descent, the struggles faced by National could even be seen in 1993, when many religious voters deserted the party for the Alliance (which attracted many protest votes, but also several religious Māori voters attracted by the party’s focus on Māori rights) and New Zealand First (which has taken many socially conservative positions over the years).

As argued above, this variation in the degree to which religious voters side with National over third-party alternatives can be explained in reference to the electoral viability of third parties and National’s chances of forming government. It was when National was



likely to lose elections between 1993 and 2002—when the vote shares of National are lowest—that religious voters were most likely to follow the cues of conservative politicians like Graeme Lee and support third parties giving explicit voice to socially conservative issues instead of voting for National. Similar to the party system in 1990, however, voters looking at opinion polls prior to the elections of 2005-2014 could see that National was most likely to win the election and form the government. Because National was a viable contender to form the government, and because socially conservative third parties failed to attract much support between 1993 and 2002, many religious voters once again concentrated their support on National instead of these third parties. As a result, the predicted probabilities in Table 2 show that a plurality or majority of high-frequency attenders supported National between 2005 and 2014.

Thus, despite the use of MMP, National continues to receive the bulk of the votes of religious voters of European descent in most elections despite the presence of socially conservative third parties. Because socially conservative third parties have proved to be structurally limited in the degree to which they can attract voters and win seats, the results presented above suggest that many religious voters will continue to concentrate their support on National over socially conservative third parties as long as National remains a viable contender to form governments. This, in turn, reinforces the conclusion reached above that a religious-secular cleavage focused to a large extent on the divide between National and Labour remains under MMP.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has re-evaluated the presence and impact of the religious-secular cleavage on voting behaviour in elections to Parliament in New Zealand. While a few studies conducted prior to the adoption of MMP found evidence of a religious-secular cleavage in New Zealand (Levine and Robinson 1976; Bean 1988, 317-319, 1992; Minkenberg 2010),

those studies conducted since the adoption of MMP have argued that religious issues and the small group of religious voters concerned with these issues have been relegated to the margins of third-party politics since the adoption of MMP. This is because (1) issues of concern to religious voters rarely feature in discussions among the largest parties, (2) the largest parties usually avoid responsibility for these issues whenever they do arise by deciding these issues as conscience votes, and (3) MMP provides incentives for issues of concern to many religious voters to be represented by third parties focused more explicitly on these issues (whilst MMP provides incentives for religious voters to support these parties).

In contrast to previous research, this paper argued that a religious-secular cleavage has resurfaced in recent elections. The analysis performed here reached two conclusions. First, the analysis showed that a religious-secular cleavage has been observable in most elections. Second, the analysis also showed that this cleavage remains focused to a considerable extent on the divide between National and Labour because the bulk of religious voters in recent elections—though confined to those of European descent—have concentrated their support on National rather than the third parties more explicitly representing socially conservative positions.

Despite the availability of third parties more clearly representing socially conservative values, and despite the increased incentives under MMP (relative to first-past-the-post) for voters to support these third parties, the results presented here are consistent with the argument that many religious voters of European descent support National over third-party alternatives due to the weaker electoral and policy prospects of socially conservative third parties and the greater prospects (however marginal) these voters might be able to influence policy when supporting National. When National's prospects of forming the government were low (as was the case in the 1990s/early 2000s), many religious voters tried supporting third parties more clearly representing socially conservative positions to replace National.

Because these socially conservative third parties proved incapable of electing many MPs, many religious voters began to concentrate their support more on National than on third parties, particularly as National became more likely to form governments during the election of 2005.

These results have implications for future research. Although the religious-secular cleavage is but one determinant of voting behaviour these findings emphasise that ignoring religious-secular issues risks missing an important aspect of electoral competition for a small but non-trivial share of the electorate. While continued secularisation may reduce the incentives for parties to represent the socially conservative side of moral issues, the findings presented here suggest that the religious-secular cleavage will continue to motivate the voting behaviour of parts of the electorate for year to come.

Additionally, these results have implications for research on the representation of religious issues in proportional representation systems more generally. While proportional representation provides incentives for party system fragmentation, religious voters will not automatically flock to parties explicitly representing their views. Instead of supporting parties representing religious voters' interests explicitly, religious voters may instead support their next most-preferred party if their preferred party remains hopeless under proportional representation—while their second most-preferred party has better prospects of shaping policy.

Finally, while this paper has focused on the party vote, future research should also consider the impact of the religious-secular cleavage on the electorate vote more explicitly than was the case here.<sup>xiii</sup> Because the electorate vote promotes constituency-focused (as opposed to nationally-focused) representation, we may observe that the effects of the religious-secular cleavage on voting behaviour are even stronger than the effects of the religious-secular cleavage on the party vote. Such an analysis may help us to understand the

diversity of opinions within the parties' caucuses in Parliament on social issues, with more socially conservative MPs voting against issues like marriage equality in electorates with more frequently attending voters and more socially liberal MPs in less observant electorates.

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**Table 1.** Logistic Regression Models of Voting for National (1) versus Labour (0)

Variables	Year								
	1990	1993	1996	1999	2002	2005	2008	2011	2014
Frequent									
Attendance	0.94*	0.49*	-0.12	0.19	-0.09	0.62*	0.82*	0.83*	0.40*
Traditional	0.56*	0.70*	0.66*	0.52*	0.64*	0.32*	0.47*	0.26*	0.36*
Attendance $\times$ Trad.	-0.70*	-0.09	0.06	-0.27	0.33	-0.44*	-0.71*	-1.01*	-0.68*
Non-European	-1.02*	-0.66*	-0.33*	-0.76*	-1.17*	-1.57*	-1.28*	-1.26*	-1.05*
Union Household	0.10	-0.99*	-0.93*	-0.92*	-1.13*	-1.02*	-0.81*	-1.14*	-1.52*
University Degree	-0.26	-0.05	-0.12	-0.24	-0.08	-0.07	-0.02	-0.35*	0.08
Income	0.30*	0.98*	0.50*	0.95*	0.56*	0.95*	0.94*	1.20*	1.08*
Rural	0.67*	0.36*	0.20	0.58*	0.82*	0.16	0.23*	0.28*	0.32*
Female	-0.14	-0.26	-0.37*	-0.19	-0.37*	-0.39*	-0.21*	-0.02	-0.17
Age	0.28*	-0.13	-0.70*	-0.66*	-0.16	0.14	0.03	0.16	0.43*
Constant	-0.12	0.12	0.17	-0.45*	-0.82*	0.08	0.23*	0.79*	1.00*
McFadden's $R^2$	0.06	0.10	0.07	0.08	0.09	0.13	0.10	0.13	0.13
n	1453	1378	950	1596	1057	2425	2034	1817	1743

\*  $p < 0.05$ , one-tailed tests. Entries are logistic regression coefficients.

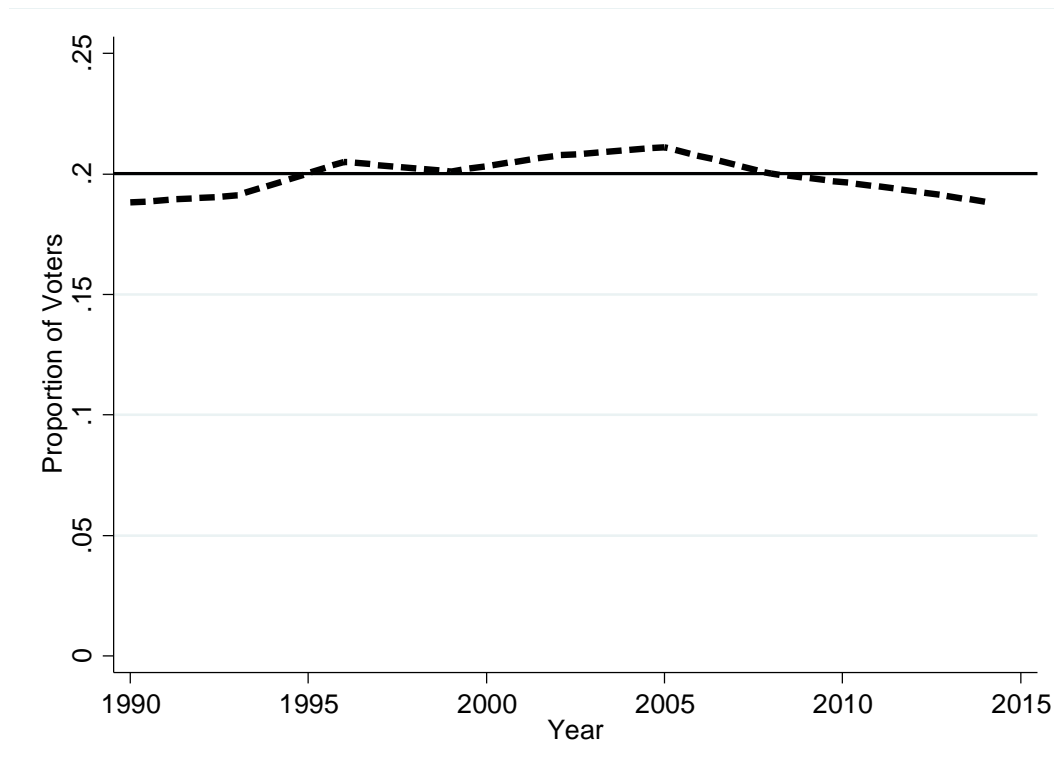


**Table 2.** Predicted Probabilities of Support for the Major Parties in Each Election

Party	Election								
	1990	1993	1996	1999	2002	2005	2008	2011	2014
National Party Vote Share	48%	35%	34%	31%	21%	39%	45%	47%	47%
<i>Predicted Probabilities<sup>1</sup></i>									
National	0.63*	0.30	0.12	0.26	0.09	0.37*	0.60*	0.70*	0.55*
Labour	0.32	0.29	0.17	0.39	0.31	0.28	0.28	0.15	0.16
Green	0.02			0.03	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.08	0.06
NewLabour/Alliance/Progressive	0.03	0.25	0.07	0.05	0.01	0.01	-	-	-
New Zealand First		0.17	0.06	0.04	0.09	0.07	0.03	0.04	0.08
ACT			0.06	0.03	0.03	0.01	0.01	-	-
Māori						0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02
Mana Movement								-	0.01
Christian Heritage/Christian Coalition	-	-	0.52	0.19	-	-			
United/United Future			-	-	0.43	0.21	0.03	-	-
Conservative								-	0.13

Entries are the predicted probabilities of voting for each party among voters attending religious services at least once per month who do not belong to one of the four denominations that traditionally have supported National (all other variables held to their median values). \* indicates that the predicted probability of voting for National is significantly greater than the percentage voting for Labour at the 0.05 level (one-tailed tests). '-' indicates that the party contested the election but was too small to include in the analysis.

**Figure 1.** Proportion of Voters in Each Election Who Attend Religious Services At Least Once Per Month



Notes: entries are the proportions of voters in each election attending religious services at least once per month. The solid black horizontal line represents the median proportion of frequently-attending religious voters.

**Figure 2.** Predicted Probabilities of Voting National by Frequency of Attendance



Note: the solid black line is the predicted probability of voting for National among voters frequently attending religious services (and who do not belong to one of the four 'traditional' religions), while the solid grey line is the predicted probability of voting for National among voters infrequently/never attending religious services (dashed lines are 90% confidence intervals), using the results from Table 1 and holding all other variables at their median values.

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- <sup>i</sup> While some definitions of ‘cleavage’ require political parties representing social group interests more explicitly than is the case with National/Labour regarding religious/secular issues—see Bartolini and Mair (1990)—this paper builds on previous research concerned more with the behaviour of religious groups and their voters for the appearance of religious cleavages (see Raymond 2016).
- <sup>ii</sup> While some research finds evidence of a cleavage between Protestants and Catholics—see, e.g., Medeiros and Noël (2013)—other research suggests that Catholics tend to side with Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists in supporting National over Labour—see, e.g., Vowles and Aimer (1993, 33-34); Vowles (1998a, 66-67).
- <sup>iii</sup> This is not to ignore those studies that have mentioned the religious-secular cleavage: Nagel (1994; Vowles (1998a); Miller (2005, 52-63).
- <sup>iv</sup> The social conservatism of religious voters can be seen when looking at attitudes towards homosexuality. Using the item ‘Homosexual relationships are always wrong’ from the New Zealand Election Studies shows that only about 20 percent of frequently attending voters in 1993 had a liberal attitude towards homosexuality (defined as those disagreeing with this statement), compared with ~40 percent among never/infrequent attenders; while the share of liberal responses increased among never/infrequent attenders in 2008 to ~60 percent, fewer than 30 percent of frequently attending voters held liberal attitudes.
- <sup>v</sup> On these points, see Raymond (2016, 367-369).
- <sup>vi</sup> Although National may not represent socially conservative religious voters’ issue positions as clearly as many of the third parties seeking their votes, some previous research—Jansen, de Graaf, and Need (2012)—showing that religious voters’ support for socially conservative parties in the Netherlands was not dampened by moderated party positions suggests religious voters may not be put off by National’s less-committed stances.
- <sup>vii</sup> The results replacing the party vote-based measure with the electorate vote-based measure provide even clearer evidence of a religious-secular cleavage than the results presented here. The fact the electorate vote-based measure produces clearer evidence of a religious-secular cleavage suggests religious voters put even more pressure on their MPs than the National Party as a whole.
- <sup>viii</sup> Respondents were asked the following question: ‘Apart from weddings, funerals, and baptisms, about how often if at all do you attend religious services these days?’.
- <sup>ix</sup> Results using the full scale to measure frequency of attendance rather than the dummy variable used here produce results that are substantively equivalent to those presented here.
- <sup>x</sup> Non-attending voters may have supported National in such large numbers due to Prime Minister Key’s positions regarding same-sex marriage. Following the adoption of same-sex marriage, which Key and several other National MPs supported, it is possible that the probabilities of voting for National do not differ by frequency of attendance because National now appeals to both religious *and* secular voters. It remains to be seen whether National will be maintain this coalition in future elections or whether secular voters will leave National and turn to other, more secular parties.
- <sup>xi</sup> While the polls in 2005 showed a tight race between National and Labour, they still predicted National’s outcome correctly (e.g., “National cuts Labour’s lead” 2005).
- <sup>xii</sup> The difference in the ratio of National:Labour probabilities between the results in Table 2 from 1999 and those seen in Figure 2 is due to the difference between the two measures of the dependent variable: the impact of attendance on the probability of voting for National is stronger when examining the binary measure than when other parties like Christian Heritage are included.
- <sup>xiii</sup> See the discussion in note vii.